



MTPDS Program Monthly Newsletter

Malawi Teacher Professional Development Support (MTPDS) program is a 3-year USAID project supporting the professional development of teachers in Malawi and implementation of the National Primary Curriculum (NPC). MTPDS is being implemented by Creative Associates International, RTI International and Seward Inc. in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

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"It is encouraging to note that learner attendance has improved. Initially, I thought as a parent I had nothing to do with teaching and learning at classroom level, but after being empowered I have seen that we can play a vital role in school improvement since we are able to identify gaps."

Towela Chavula (SMC Member Ng'ongo Primary School)

School Report Cards: Bringing accountability to schools



Towela during a visit to the school

RICHARD MOYO, A TEACHER at Ng'ongo Primary School in a rural area of Mzimba North, and Towela Chavula, a farmer from a near-by village, would not have much to share about their work if they had not both been elected onto the School Management Committee (SMC). This has provided an opportunity for them to work together towards a common dream of children in their area obtaining a quality education.

Despite being key stakeholders in the management of their school, SMC members like Towela Chavula often have little idea of what goes on in classrooms, beyond what is reported by teachers in their learners' end of term reports. The absence of consolidated records of learner performance in most schools further pushes school community members to the periphery. Richard Moyo and fellow teachers commonly think such record keeping is not a priority but rather a waste of time. As a result, insufficient records are maintained in schools and their absence thwarts close scrutiny of teacher and learner performance.

One of MTPDS's areas of focus is to

enhance parental and community participation in the monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the new primary curriculum at the school level.

In order to enhance the accountability of teachers, the project has implemented a user-friendly monitoring tool called the School Report Card (SRC). In seven pilot zones, MTPDS has organized training for SMC members on the use of the School Report Card. During these trainings, community members like Towela and teachers like Richard were trained to use SRCs in consolidating reports prepared by school administrators, including literacy skills assessments, to monitor their school's commitment and performance. This is a new role for the SMCs, which are traditionally viewed as being responsible for issues like constructing classrooms.

After attending the training, the two SMC members made their first monthly visit to their school in May to monitor teacher performance and learner records. At this school, the assessment records, stock books, time book and log books had not been properly maintained. To address this problem,

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Signposts to Literacy: New directions at Tedzani School



Nditha Kuwerenga' signposts for literacy and car park at Tedzani School

I WANT TO GIVE you directions to Tedzani Primary School, in case you get an invitation to attend their next literacy fair. First, head out of Blantyre in the direction of Mwanza. After about 70 km, take a small turning on your left and after a kilometer take another road on the left which winds between rocky outcrops and baobab trees for 10 km until you reach the Shire River. Cross the river on the dam wall of Tedzani hydro electricity power plant.

On the other side of the river you will find a signpost pointing to the school, which also says in Chichewa "Parents, cover the *Nditha Kuwerenga* books so they last a long time". After another half kilometer, at a junction, another sign points straight on to the school, which also says "Nditha Kuwerenga is a new kind of lesson for Standard 1". Proceed past the electricity generating plant and steeply uphill until you reach the "Nditha Kuwerenga" Car Park. Then, walk downhill towards the large signpost outside the head teacher's

office which says 'Nditha Kuwerenga is the Foundation of Reading'.

Obeck Likwemba will welcome you into his office. Over his desk another sign says, "Teachers, try the Nditha Kuwerenga routine - 'I do, we do, you do'." He will be glad to introduce you to satisfied parents like Ronald Kadzimirere who told me, "We are proud of our teacher's here. My daughter, Loney, has already learnt to read in Standard 1. That has never happened before."

Then, Milliam Kamangira will show you into her small Standard 1 classroom, overlooking the river. You will see learners like Loney demonstrate their knowledge of letters and letter sounds, and their ability to read and write simple sentences with meaning.

I was accompanied on my visit by the MTPDS Divisional Coordinator, Niffer Chikonje, who is coaching the teachers at Tedzani. She has acquired

Divisional Teacher Training Coordinator Niffer Chikonje with Obeck Likwemba, Head Teacher for Tedzani School

the affectionate nickname – "Nditha" – which means "I can". Now, that's a good name for a coach!

At Tedzani School the key components of the Maziko a Kuwerenga literacy intervention are coming together in a powerful combination: teacher training, coaching, time on task, assessment, leadership, community support, and availability of essential basic resources.

At Tedzani Power Plant they produce electricity that lights homes and powers businesses across the nation. At Tedzani School they also produce a different kind of light and power – but no less essential - literacy. I have provided directions if you want to visit.

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the SMC held a meeting with teachers to stress the importance of keeping such records and making them available. During the month of June there was a noticeable improvement. "Honestly, previously we thought that some records are not necessary, rather just time consuming. But with the coming in of SMC to monitor our performance, we have really improved on records keeping,"

observed Richard Moyo.

For Towela Chavula, whose committee also met with parents to sensitize them on monitoring attendance and performance in the classroom, it is equally exciting. "It is encouraging to note that learner attendance has improved. Initially, I thought as a parent I had nothing to do with teaching and learning at classroom level, but after being empowered I have seen that we can play a vital role

in school improvement, since we are able to identify gaps. We are now given accurate information and records of learner performance which can help us hold our school accountable for their performance. It is not only putting pressure on the teachers, but also us to ensure that they attend classes and perform to the best of their abilities." MTPDS recognizes the great potential SMCs can have in improving accountability in schools.

EGRA-Lite: Regular monitoring of learner performance



Divisional Teacher Training Coordinator Chrissie Phiri assessing an early grade learner

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS TO determine reading skills acquisition has always been an integral part of the MTPDS project. As such, the project is continuously modifying its M&E systems to more effectively track the literacy performance of learners. Since the beginning of the project, MTPDS has been using the internationally recognized Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) instrument to assess learners on an annual basis. This is done through a countrywide random sample of schools, in order to track progress in early grade literacy attainment due to various levels of project-supported literacy interventions. In the June MTPDS Newsletter, the use of “Tangerine” software on tablet computers for conducting EGRA assessments with students in the field was highlighted. This month’s feature focuses on the use of a simplified EGRA instrument (fondly referred to as “EGRA-lite” within the project) for more frequent monitoring of learner performance.

In response to emerging needs within the project to conduct more frequent learner assessments that are less demanding on the enumerators and learners, while also being able to capture essential data related to literacy attainment, MTPDS developed a modified version of the EGRA instrument, subsequently named EGRA-lite. The complete EGRA instrument, which is used during the annual assessment, tests learners on 9 skills: (a) letter naming, (b) syllable segmentation, (c) initial sound identification, (d) syllable reading, (e) familiar word reading, (f) nonsense (unfamiliar) word

reading, (g) oral reading fluency, (h) listening comprehension and (i) reading comprehension. The assessment usually takes about 15 minutes to conduct and allows for in-depth analysis of literacy attainment. In contrast, the EGRA-lite version focuses only on 4 skills: (a) letter identification, (b) syllable reading, (c) familiar word reading, and (d) comprehension. The instrument takes nearly half the time to conduct as the full EGRA version. Although EGRA-lite does not lend itself to the depth of analysis provided by the full EGRA version, it allows the project to track progress in the skills deemed most essential to foundational literacy attainment on a more regular basis, with a quicker turn-around in assessment results and data analysis.

The EGRA-lite instrument was first utilized in May 2012 for baseline data collection in a study comparing learner performance at schools receiving three different levels of intervention: (1) national CPD schools, (2) *Maziko a Kuwerenga* intervention district schools and (3) intervention district schools receiving additional coaching support from MTPDS. A second round of EGRA-lite data collection was conducted in early July 2012. The instrument is designed to be utilized at least twice each term to track learner progress over shorter periods of time and correlate measurable changes in literacy performance to specific project activities. The results will determine whether and how much differing impact the various levels of project interventions have on learner performance in literacy, especially in reading fluency and comprehension.

Schools hold Literacy Fairs throughout Malawi

As the school year came to an end in early July, a number of schools in various parts of the country held Literacy Fairs to celebrate progress made in literacy teaching and learning at their schools through support from projects like MTPDS.

Many schools have experienced great success in implementing the MTPDS literacy intervention and are already seeing improved teaching and learning results. Therefore, a number of these schools took their own initiative during the last weeks of the school year to hold literacy fairs and open days to show their communities the excellent strides their children and teachers are making towards attaining early grade literacy.

MTPDS staff was privileged to attend some of these literacy fairs and experience first-hand the excitement that radiated from teachers, students, and parents alike as they watched Standard 1 learners reading with fluency and teachers ably displaying their newly-trained teaching skills.

A few of these literacy fairs were even highlighted in the national media, with articles written in the *Weekend Nation* and the *Daily Times* newspapers, along with a short news clip telecast on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation’s TV station.

MTPDS would like to thank those innovative schools that took the initiative to highlight the achievements of their hard working teachers and students and putting literacy at the forefront of their communities’ minds.



A classroom demonstration during a literacy fair at Gunda Primary School

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Update

MTPDS rolls out Literacy Module 3



Dr Khasu of Domasi College supervising group work during TOT for Literacy 3 at Liwonde

THE 2007 INTRODUCTION OF the Primary Curriculum Assessment Reform (PCAR) in Malawian schools meant a paradigm shift to an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) approach, which places much more emphasis on learner-centered and participatory methods. The approach also includes continuous assessment. Since many areas in the new curriculum demand

new skills and ways for teachers to successfully cope with the innovations in OBE, MTPDS, in close collaboration with MoEST, continues to develop training materials to support nationwide Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for mentors, school managers and teachers in areas of leadership and early literacy.

The experience of delivering the first two Literacy Modules: *Teaching Chichewa and English* and *Developing Literacy: Effective Teaching Techniques* shows that the effort has been successful. Teachers acknowledge that concepts from the materials have been a huge eye opener in their professional career. Phonological awareness, which is the ability to recognize individual sounds in spoken words, is the most recurrently mentioned thematic area hailed in improving literacy skills acquisition. The first two modules emphasized engaging teachers to reflect on their teaching practices and sharing

practices that can help in solving reading and writing problems for learners in the lower primary classes. These Literacy Modules also present a systematic overview of literacy skills and teaching practices that will assist learners to develop letter, syllable and word recognition skills.

Building on these lessons and concepts, the project has developed a third training module, *Literacy Module 3, Developing Literacy: The Role of Phonics and Fluency in Learning to Read*. This is expected to help teachers in guiding learners to develop fluency, comprehension and vocabulary skills in both Chichewa and English. Key concepts in the module are: *Teaching letters through phonics, Teaching syllables and Improving learners reading fluency*. The national roll-out of this module started with Training of Trainers at Hippo View Resort in Liwonde on July 23-24, 2012, and delivery by PEAs at cluster level will be ongoing throughout August

Events Calendar for August 2012

1. **Policy:**
9 Aug: Dissemination meeting on the clarified roles and responsibilities of MoEST institutions and departments
2. **CPD:**
1-7 Aug: Training of Facilitators for CPD Literacy Module 3
8-10 Aug: Pilot testing of Leadership Module 4
13-31 Aug: Literacy Module 3 training of teachers at the cluster level
3. **Early Grade Literacy:**
1-3 Aug: Finalizing draft of Maziko a Kuwerenga Literacy Module 3
6-31 Aug: Community sensitization meetings and support for SMC/PTA initiatives
4. **Quality Teaching and Learning Materials:**
20-31 Aug: Std. 4 Textbook Refinement workshop at MIE
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
1-15 Aug: Data analysis of EGRA Lite and classroom observations
1-31 Aug: Monitoring and support for SMC's implementation of School Report Cards

It is the belief of the project, that through the success of these trainings, the concept of CPD will be institutionalized beyond the life of the project and that head teachers will be more creative in providing leadership in developing their own school-based CPD programmes. Further, it is expected that parents and community members at large will be more forthcoming in supporting their teachers in the learning of their own children.

Welcome

MTPDS welcomes two new members to its team. Paul Msokera Phiri and Prinny Nachiola both join as Divisional Accounts Officers (DAOs) for South West and Shire Highlands Education Divisions respectively.

Note from the Editor: MTPDS Program Monthly Newsletter intends to provide insights on activities, achievements and success stories from the field. We are therefore inviting comments, contributions and tips for teacher professional development. Please send your contributions to the Editor, MTPDS Program, Area 10/612, Tsoka Road, Private bag B481, Lilongwe, Tel: (+265) 1 794 977. E-mail: info@mtpds.rti.org, Web: www.mtpds.org. For useful downloadable resources: <http://www.mtpds.org/resources>